

The U.S. Government deliberately lied about the Gulf of Tonkin incident and faked intelligence as pretext for Vietnam War

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Intelligence on Vietnam War 'faked'

By New York
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[The Age](#)

(Australia)

ONE of America's top spy agencies faked key intelligence used to justify its intervention in the Vietnam War, it has been revealed.

But the revelation was kept secret by the National Security Agency, partly because of fears that it would boost criticism of the intelligence services over the war in Iraq.

According to material uncovered by the NSA's own historian, Robert Hanyok, middle-ranking officers altered material relating to the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Two US destroyers, Maddox and Turner Joy, were attacked by North Vietnamese craft in the gulf on August 2, 1964. Two days later, amid bad weather and considerable confusion in the US chain of command, Maddox reported that it had been fired on a second time.

Although its commander soon cast doubt on the reports, signals intelligence reported that the North Vietnamese admitted "we sacrificed two ships".

In revenge president Lyndon Johnson ordered air raids against North Vietnamese naval facilities and Congress authorised "all necessary steps including the use of armed force" to defend South Vietnam.

But Mr Hanyok found that timings on key intelligence intercepts had been changed and the "two ships" probably referred to the loss of two sailors in the first attack.

He blamed middle-ranking staff who realised the NSA's mistakes almost immediately but covered them up, not for political reasons but to hide the original mistakes.

At the time, senior administration officials cited the faked paperwork in testimony before Congress. It has even been suggested that President Johnson was so keen to deploy troops that he fabricated the whole episode.

TELEGRAPH

Washington hid damaging Vietnam finding

By Scott Shane in Washington
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[Sydney Morning Herald](#)

The US National Security Agency has kept secret a 2001 finding by its own historian that its officers deliberately distorted critical intelligence during the Tonkin Gulf episode that helped precipitate the Vietnam War.

The historian's conclusion was the first serious accusation that the agency's intercepts were falsified to support the belief North Vietnamese ships attacked US destroyers on August 4, 1964, two days after a previous clash.

Most historians have concluded in recent years there was no second attack, but they have assumed the agency's intercepts were unintentionally misread, not purposely altered. The research by Robert Hanyok, the agency's historian, was detailed four years ago in an in-house article that remains secret, in part because agency officials feared its release might prompt uncomfortable comparisons with the flawed intelligence used to justify the war in Iraq, according to an intelligence official.

Matthew Aid, an independent historian who has discussed Mr Hanyok's Tonkin Gulf research with agency and CIA officials, said he had decided to speak publicly about the findings because he believed they should have been released long ago.

"This material is relevant to debates we as Americans are having about the war in Iraq and intelligence reform," he said.

Mr Hanyok believed the initial misinterpretation of North Vietnamese intercepts was probably an honest mistake. But after months of detective work in the agency's archives, Mr Hanyok concluded mid-level agency officials discovered the error almost immediately, but covered it up and doctored documents so that they appeared to provide evidence of an attack.

"Rather than come clean about their mistake, they helped launch the United States into a bloody war that would last for 10 years," Mr Aid said.

President Lyndon Johnson cited the August 4 episode to persuade Congress in 1964 to authorise military action in Vietnam, despite doubts about the attack that arose almost immediately. Asked about Mr Hanyok's research, an agency spokesman, Don Weber, said the agency intended to release the material late next month but delayed the release "in an effort to be consistent with our preferred practice of providing the public [with] a more contextual perspective".

The intelligence official said agency staff historians first pushed for public release in 2002, but the idea lost momentum in 2003, in part because of the concerns about parallels with Iraq intelligence. Mr Aid said he had heard from other intelligence officials the same explanation for the delay in public release.

Robert McNamara, who as defence secretary played a central role in the Tonkin Gulf affair, said in an interview he had never been told of evidence intelligence had been altered to shore up the scant evidence of a North Vietnamese attack.

"That really is surprising to me," said Mr McNamara, 89. Mr Hanyok said Mr McNamara had used the altered intercepts in 1964 and 1968 in testimony before Congress. "I think they ought to make all the material public, period," he said.

The supposed second North Vietnamese attack, on the US destroyers Maddox and C. Turner

Joy, played a significant role in history. Johnson responded by ordering retaliatory airstrikes on North Vietnam and obtaining congressional backing for war.

The New York Times